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Security Council

Seventy-third year

Provisional

8153rd meeting
Tuesday, 9 January 2018, 9.30 a.m.
New York

President:	Mr. Umarov	(Kazakhstan)
Members:	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Llorentty Soliz
	China	Mr. Zhang Dianbin
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Netherlands	Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren
	Peru	Mr. Meza-Cuadra
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Iliichev
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Hickey
	United States of America	Ms. French

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/16)

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The meeting was called to order at 9.40 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (S/2018/16)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2018/16, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lacroix.

Mr. Lacroix (*spoke in French*): As is customary at this time of year, Mr. President, allow me to begin by wishing you all the best for 2018, welcoming the new non-permanent members of the Security Council and, of course, wishing your country, Kazakhstan, all the best for its presidency for the month of January.

I welcome this opportunity to address the Council once again on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) (S/2018/16), which has been submitted to the Council, takes stock of the situation and makes recommendations on the steps to be taken.

A year ago the Council met (see S/PV.7856) to welcome with great hope the signing, under the auspices of the national Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, which made it possible to defuse political tensions in the country and chart a course towards the holding of transparent and credible elections by the end of 2017. One year later, I regret to inform the Council that implementation of the agreement has been only partial. Although non-negligible advances have been made in preparing the elections in the past year, the acts of violence that took place during the demonstrations on 31 December last in Kinshasa and in the country's interior are reminders of the fact that the political situation remains very fragile.

The security situation is also cause for grave concern. As the Council is aware, United Nations peacekeepers suffered their heaviest losses in 20 years when the advance base of the Tanzanian contingent in Semuliki, North Kivu, was attacked, presumably by rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF). The deaths of those Tanzanian peacekeepers following several hours of combat underscores, as if we needed to be reminded, the volatility of the security situation in certain parts of eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo.

I must also remind the Council that United Nations civilian personnel are also exposed to security risks in certain parts of the country. The deaths in March last year of the two members of the United Nations group of experts in the Kasai region is a tragic reminder of the situation.

Given this backdrop, I will focus my statement on the political and security challenges facing MONUSCO in the coming months and identify potential ways forward.

The delays in the electoral process, the legitimacy crisis of the institutions of the Republic and the lack of progress towards implementing defusing measures have led to frustration, impatience and tensions, which led to acts of violence last December. Let me take this opportunity to condemn the violent repression by the national security forces of the demonstrations organized by civil society on 31 December last. It is key that the competent national authorities conduct the necessary investigations to identify the perpetrators and bring to justice those presumed responsible for human rights violations.

I also deplore the fact that the national security forces created obstacles for the MONUSCO troops who were patrolling on 31 December. Activities related to the monitoring of the political, security and human rights

situation are part and parcel of MONUSCO's mandate and should be fully supported by the authorities.

Given these challenges, it is vital that all sectors of the Congolese political class refrain from any acts leading to confrontation or to violence. Dialogue remains the only way to resolve the political challenges facing the country.

(*spoke in English*)

Although political tensions persist, electoral preparations are advancing. The long-awaited electoral calendar was published on 5 November 2017, the amended electoral law was promulgated by the President on 24 December 2017, and the voter registration process is expected to conclude in February.

It is essential that all political actors play a constructive role in the implementation of the electoral calendar. The Government, the ruling majority, the opposition and civil society, and the Independent National Electoral Commission must all play their part in in ensuring that electoral preparations proceed in a timely fashion.

It is imperative that the political leaders of the Democratic Republic of the Congo adhere to the Constitution, the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement and the electoral calendar, which together provide the political and legal framework for the holding of free, fair and credible elections, leading to a peaceful transition of power and the consolidation of the country's democratic institutions. Political brinkmanship and a refusal to compromise would only result in further delays and a deepening of the political crisis.

The concerted support of the Council, key international partners and regional actors remains key to advancing the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Through his good offices, Special Representative of the Secretary-General Maman Sidikou, working in close collaboration with Special Envoy Said Djinnit and regional actors, has worked tirelessly to ensure that the main political actors in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remain committed to the 31 December 2016 Political Agreement despite their many differences. Thanks to their efforts, the United Nations has strengthened its cooperation with the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Southern African Development Community in support of the political process. It is essential that the region continue to impress upon the Congolese political leaders the need to pursue dialogue and place the legitimate aspirations of the Congolese people above their own interests.

At the same time, it is imperative that the Democratic Republic of the Congo's partners, working in close collaboration with the Government and the electoral authorities, provide the necessary political, financial, logistical and technical support to ensure the timely holding of credible elections. Further delays in the electoral process risk not only fuelling political tensions but also compounding an already fragile security situation.

In recent months, armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo have launched repeated attacks on positions of the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC), inflicting losses on the FARDC and capturing, albeit temporarily, resource-rich territories. These attacks, mainly involving Mayi-Mayi groups, are taking place in a context of competition for natural resources and continued intercommunity violence, often fuelled by local political actors seeking to take advantage of the current situation.

The impact on the civilian population has been severe, with more than 4 million persons internally displaced as a result of violence and humanitarian agencies predicting that this figure could rise significantly this year. It is, however, encouraging to note that the FARDC is gradually regaining the initiative against the Mayi-Mayi groups and taking control of territories previously lost to the armed groups.

MONUSCO remains actively engaged, in line with its strategic priorities, in the protection of civilians. As the Council will recall, in late September MONUSCO acted decisively in support of the FARDC in repelling an attack by Mayi-Mayi Yakutumba on Uvira, the second-largest city in South Kivu. The actions of MONUSCO, which were critical in preventing the fall of the city, were a tangible demonstration of the Mission's readiness to take robust action against armed groups that pose a threat to the civilian population.

In Beni territory, North Kivu, after being dormant for months following major operations by the FARDC and MONUSCO in 2016, the ADF resurfaced in the summer of 2017, carrying out deadly attacks against civilians, the FARDC and MONUSCO. The killing of 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers of MONUSCO's Force Intervention Brigade and the wounding of 44 others on

7 December 2017 was the latest in a string of deadly attacks perpetrated by suspected ADF elements.

When I visited Semuliki, shortly after the incident, I witnessed the particularly difficult terrain in which the Brigade operates and the violence of the attack that the assailants carried out against the base. Despite the heavy losses sustained by the Tanzanian troops, I was reassured by the Tanzanian authorities in Dar Es Salaam that they remain committed to addressing the threat posed by the ADF and other armed groups in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. I wish to take this opportunity to once again convey my deepest condolences to the Government and the people of Tanzania for this tragic loss.

The asymmetric nature of the threat posed by the ADF requires a combination of military and non-military means. Neutralizing the ADF will require much closer regional cooperation, enhanced information-gathering and analysis, disruption of the political and economic support networks of the group, strengthened cooperation among MONUSCO and the national security forces, and targeted military operations.

As part of the Secretariat's response to the Semuliki incident, the Secretary-General has appointed former Assistant Secretary-General Dmitry Titov to lead a special investigation into the circumstances surrounding the Semuliki incident that will provide recommendations on actions required to address the ADF threat and enhance the ability of MONUSCO to address the threat posed by armed groups. Mr. Titov and his team, which includes senior representatives of the Tanzanian armed forces, have already begun their work and will be in the region in the coming days with a view to presenting their findings to the Secretary-General by the beginning of next month. Naturally, we look forward to engaging closely with the Council once the investigation team has completed its work.

Meanwhile, MONUSCO, in line with the strategic priorities reaffirmed by the Security Council following the strategic review, has enhanced its support to the political and electoral processes and is making the necessary adjustments to its civilian, police and military components in order to enable a comprehensive approach to the protection of civilians, including by monitoring and reporting on the human rights situation. Efforts are also ongoing to increase the mobility and flexibility of the force and the Mission's police and civilian components to enable protection through projection.

Specifically, preparations are under way for the deployment of a third rapidly deployable battalion, which will be operational by next month. We are reviewing the statement of unit requirements for rapidly deployable battalions so as to ensure that the two that will be deployed later this year are lighter and more flexible. Within the framework of the Secretary-General's recommendation to review United Nations air assets, MONUSCO has conducted a review to assess how to obtain air assets that are more suitable for its operations and enhance their use.

Regarding the Force Intervention Brigade, efforts are ongoing to train the units in jungle warfare with a view to responding more effectively to the asymmetric environment in which they operate. Steps are also being undertaken to improve information gathering and analysis.

Regarding the police component, the redeployment of a Senegalese formed olice unit (FPU) from Goma to Kinshasa is almost complete, and the unit is expected to be fully operational by the end of this week. Some forward bases have been closed, including in the Bunia area, as the MONUSCO force continues to optimize its presence on the ground. We are also working on the review of statement of unit requirements for FPUs to enable the swift redeployment of FPU elements to other areas of operations based on the evolution of the situation on the ground. I look forward to engaging closely with Council Members and troop- and police-contributing countries over the coming weeks and months to ensure that MONUSCO continues to evolve in response to the challenges on the ground.

On the political and electoral front, I should note that MONUSCO continues to provide logistical and technical support to the Electoral Commission for the voter registration and other electoral activities. As requested in the electoral calendar, MONUSCO has submitted to the Electoral Commission its logistical support plan for the upcoming presidential and national and provincial legislative elections, which would be a major undertaking requiring adequate resources.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to highlight the importance of the continued support of Council members and Member States to MONUSCO. While acknowledging the need to rationalize resources by making better and more efficient use of available

assets, it is vital that MONUSCO be afforded the necessary means to effectively support the political process and address the daunting security challenges that the Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to face.

The coming months will be critical in safeguarding the collective investment made by international, regional and national actors in stabilizing the Democratic Republic of the Congo over the past two decades and in preparing the ground for the consolidation of peace and stability in the country and the wider region. The United Nations, through the good offices of the newly appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, will continue to be fully committed to working closely with all concerned actors in achieving this objective.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Maman Sidikou, who is completing his assignment as Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for his tireless efforts in good offices initiatives and in supporting the promotion of human rights and the protection of civilians over the past two years.

The President: I thank Mr. Lacroix for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations for his illuminating briefing. We fully support the recommendations of the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/16).

I would like to express, on behalf of France, our firm condemnation of the violence utilized by the security forces during the 31 December protests in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which claimed several victims. France once again calls for respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms, including the freedom of expression and the right to information and peaceful protest, which are essential components of a democracy. We highlight the need for proportional use of force in the context of law enforcement. In that connection, we call on the Congolese authorities to fully investigate the violence in order to hold its perpetrators accountable before the law. The Congolese authorities have already shown that they can be proactive in fighting impunity, as seen recently in the conviction, in South Kivu, of 12 individuals for sexual violence.

Credible, transparent and peaceful elections that ensure a peaceful and democratic transition are necessary for the stability of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the entire region. In that regard, we call for the effective holding of elections, as scheduled in the electoral calendar published on 5 November 2017 and in line the Constitution and the spirit of consensus that prevailed during the signing of the Comprehensive and Inclusive political Agreement on 31 December 2016. We call on the Congolese authorities and Independent National Electoral Commission to take all necessary measures, particularly those that would enable the rapid deployment of a joint team of international experts to support the electoral process in the Congo.

The 31 December 2016 agreement is more important than ever, as it is the latest embodiment of Congolese national consensus. Its full implementation is urgent, as it contains the key measures to ease tension so as to enable credible and peaceful elections. As the Secretary-General points out, no credible electoral process can take place in a context of repression. It is therefore essential that all conditions be put in place so that all candidates can run for office without obstruction. This is all the more important given that security and humanitarian situation remains troubling, as Under-Secretary-General Lacroix noted, and that the blocking of the political process would only exacerbate the instability that threatens the region.

The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) is carrying out remarkable work in this difficult context, and I commend the Mission's reconfiguration efforts in order to adapt to the security situation and to the priorities of the mandate. MONUSCO is facing significant challenges, such as the attack in Semuliki. On behalf of France, I once again express our condolences and our solidarity with Tanzania following the tragedy that beset those Blue Helmets. That incident makes it all the more important to reaffirm our support for MONUSCO and its development. France is encouraged, in that connection, by the clear guidelines set in place, and I warmly commend the exceptional work of Mr. Maman Sedikou. We also extend our full support to his successor, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, with whom we have worked closely in her previous position and who we trust completely.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): Côte d'Ivoire commends Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping

Operations, for his exceptional briefing on the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In that connection, I would like to comment on two key issues in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: the current electoral process and the security situation.

With regard to the electoral process, my delegation welcomes the publishing on 5 November, by the Independent National Electoral Commission, of the electoral calendar, thus setting the holding of general presidential, legislative and provincial elections for 23 December 2018 in order to help the country emerge from this ongoing and protracted sociopolitical crisis. To that end, Côte d'Ivoire believes that it is now up to all stakeholders in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and in particular the Commission, to do their utmost to ensure adherence to the set date of 23 December 2018 for the holding of general elections, in accordance with the commitments they freely entered into under the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016. All Congolese parties must, in a spirit of peace and mutual trust, work towards the establishment of conditions conducive to the holding of peaceful, credible and democratic elections by 23 December 2018. In that regard, my delegation remains concerned about recent demonstrations that resulted in loss of life, major material damage and numerous arrests of demonstrators. Côte d'Ivoire calls on the Congolese Government to take all the appropriate measures to calm the situation and defuse the sociopolitical climate. We also call on all political actors to exercise restraint and avoid violent demonstrations.

My delegation welcomes the unity among Council members on this political track and the tireless efforts of the Organization to enhance synergy in the efforts of the United Nations and international and regional organizations — in particular the African Union, the European Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the International Organization of La Francophonie and the Southern African Development Community — with a view to a speedy resolution of the crisis.

With regard to the security situation, Côte d'Ivoire expresses its concern about the growing insecurity in the context of widespread human rights violations, fuelled mainly by the proliferation of armed groups in the east of the country, especially in North Kivu and South Kivu, as well as in the west, specifically in the Kasai region. Attacks by such groups led to the deaths of 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers on 7 December 2017. Côte d'Ivoire once again expresses its condolences to the Republic of Tanzania for the deaths of those soldiers and pays tribute to their memory. My country condemns this deadly attack and, as Chair of the Working Group on Peacekeeping Operations, looks forward to the results of the investigation aimed at determining the exact circumstances of this tragedy and to taking appropriate measures so that such tragedies are not repeated in future.

It goes without saying that the existence of such armed groups poses a serious threat to stability throughout the region and to the overall process for ending the crisis. Taking appropriate measures to deter those groups must therefore be a priority of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), in addition to its efforts to support the political process. In my delegation's view, those are the considerations to be taken into account when it comes to renewing MONUSCO's mandate, which is scheduled for March.

In conclusion, my delegation would like to warmly congratulate Mr. Maman Sidikou, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and outgoing Head of MONUSCO, for the quality of the work he has carried out in an extremely difficult environment, as well as to congratulate Ms. Leila Zerrougui, the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, on her appointment to replace Mr. Sidikou. We wish her every success in her new duties.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): Allow me, first of all, to express the gratitude of the delegation of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix and his team for their comprehensive and detailed briefing this morning on the situation and recent developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). I would also like to thank the Permanent Representative of Côte d'Ivoire, Ambassador Bernard Tanoh-Boutchoue, for his outstanding presentation as Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004), concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His contributions help us to better understand the situation in the country.

We in Equatorial Guinea have always closely followed events taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and all the more so now as a member of the Security Council, because it is a brother country whose problems we cannot stand by and watch indifferently and because we experience its problems almost as if they were ours. I therefore want to express Equatorial Guinea's full commitment to, and support for, bringing about stability and peace in that country.

The delegation of Equatorial Guinea believes that the different political and social actors in the country should understand that the only possible way to overcome the current complex situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is through a transparent, frank and inclusive dialogue carried out in good faith. The need for the different actors to understand one another flows from the enormous responsibility they have to lead the country to credible and transparent elections and to avoid unnecessary delays, which generally lead to more tension and violence. All of the country's groups must join the process of political dialogue with a positive attitude and make their due contributions, which in practice means honouring the agreements signed by the Congolese parties on 18 October and 31 December 2016 on organizing peaceful, credible and transparent elections, in order to pave the way towards a peaceful solution to the political crisis in the country. In that regard, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must play a leading and catalytic role in the legislative and logistical aspects, especially when it comes to supporting the Independent National Electoral Commission so that it can conclude all its preparatory work before the elections, despite the challenges it faces.

The President of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea, Mr. Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, in his speech on 29 January 2016 on the occasion of the twenty-sixth Summit of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in Addis Ababa, said:

> "At present, nobody can deny that our security is facing a global terrorist threat and the risks it represents for our societies, as well as the conflicts suffered by certain brother countries. This situation requires our collective mobilization, as well as mutual collaboration and close consultation."

International cooperation is the only way to be able to effectively confront a threat that can no longer be responded to from an exclusively national perspective.

In that regard, Equatorial Guinea is convinced that the contribution of various international bodies, including the United Nations, in close cooperation with the European Union, the African Union, the countries of the region, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, is essential in the search for a lasting solution to the political situation in the country. To the same end, Equatorial Guinea would like to echo the call made by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union for the establishment of a coordination mechanism that would include all actors with a view to ensuring effective and coherent support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Despite the significant progress made in the country in recent years with the stabilization of many regions, which we must certainly welcome, the humanitarian and security situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains worrying, with persistent abuses and violations of the political and civil rights of the civilian population, prevailing impunity, and illegal exploitation of resources by militias and other various armed groups still active in the area. In that regard, Equatorial Guinea calls for ensuring the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, signed on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, and that its signatories and guarantors take the necessary steps and redouble their efforts to guarantee its full and effective implementation, for which the neutralization of armed groups operating in the east of the country is paramount. The constant incidents of violence and human rights violations must cease, and those responsible for them must be brought to justice.

Finally, I would like to express the deepest condolences of the Republic of Equatorial Guinea to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Secretary-General and Tanzania on the deaths of 15 of that country's peacekeepers. We commend MONUSCO and support its commendable and tireless efforts to promote peace, security and stability in this brotherly country despite the challenges it faces and the sacrifices and losses it has suffered, and not always in a favourable environment. From this Chamber, we would like to encourage the Mission to continue to support the authorities and institutions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in its stabilization and consolidation efforts

in the country, while at the same time we recommend strengthening the Mission so that it can face the great challenges that will arise throughout 2018, until the holding of the presidential, legislative and provincial elections on 23 December.

Mr. Llorentty Soliz (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): Bolivia thanks Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, for his briefing. We also welcome the appointment of Ms. Leila Zerrougui as Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). We are confident that her experience, technical knowledge and leadership will be of great value to the Mission. We would also like to thank Mr. Maman Sidikou for his services as Head of MONUSCO.

We reiterate our concern about the unrelenting environment of violence and serious insecurity. We also regret that conflict is focused on disputes over access to natural resources, clashes between armed groups, intercommunity tensions and ethnic violence. We strongly condemn such occurrences, including the violent acts that took place during the 31 December protests and, in particular, the threats being made by armed groups in different areas of the country that have led to the continued deterioration of the humanitarian situation, as mentioned in the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/16). The report highlights the fact that more than 4 million people were internally displaced, including nearly 900,000 women and more than 2 million children. Also, in recent years, more than 620,000 Congolese sought refuge in neighbouring countries, 100,000 of them in 2017. Approximately 8 million people face severe food insecurity, which represents a 30 per cent increase over the same period last year. An estimated 13 million people will need protection and humanitarian assistance this year, a 50 percent increase over 2017.

We commend the efforts of humanitarian partners and encourage them to continue their work. We also urgently call on the international community and donor countries to pay special attention to this situation, which is now a level 3 emergency, the highest level of emergency identified by the United Nations Emergency Relief Coordinator.

Bolivia supports the Special Representative's initiatives and good offices with regard to the implementation of the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, in particular its impact on the implementation of the confidence-building measures enshrined in the Agreement and its efforts to create a positive atmosphere for the holding of peaceful and credible elections. We also highlight MONUSCO's work on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as well as the repatriation, resettlement and reintegration of members of the various insurgent groups, both Congolese and foreign, operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We commend the intensification of the Mission's efforts to provide security to civilians through its early-warning system, the reinforcement of its troops for its projection strategy and by intensifying its presence at the Semuliki base following the terrible attack on peacekeepers on 7 December 2017. Bolivia associates itself with the words expressed by various members of the Security Council. We express not only our sorrow and condolences, but also our solidarity with the families of the Blue Helmets who died in those circumstances.

Similarly, we offer our support for local conflict-resolution mechanisms that promote peaceful coexistence between communities and joint monitoring with the authorities regarding the spread of insurgent groups in mining areas in the province of Maniema, among other initiatives. We also encourage the Mission to continue all these and other initiatives for peace and stability in the region, in coordination with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its armed forces, in accordance with its mandate.

Bolivia welcomes the publication of the electoral calendar by the Independent National Electoral Commission on 5 November. We highlight the progress made by that body with respect to voter registration and call upon it to adhere to the timeline and to complete the voter registration. The 31 December Agreement must be respected and supported by all actors for the effective conduct of peaceful, credible, inclusive and timely elections leading to a peaceful transfer of power. We urge the signatories of the Agreement to implement the confidence-building measures enshrined in the document. With this understanding, Bolivia takes note of the prompt adoption of laws in Parliament to revise electoral regulations and allocate a budget for the elections.

We commend the consensus of the region for the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework as well as the efforts of the Southern African Development Community and the African Union Peace and Security Council to provide the Independent National Electoral Commission with the necessary resources for the implementation of the 31 December Agreement. We welcome the meeting held on 9 December among the Presidents of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Angola and the Republic of the Congo, in which a communiqué was issued calling on political actors to safeguard peace and work for peaceful elections. Similarly, we believe that the joint work of the Head of MONUSCO and the Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region in preparing the elections, as well as their outreach to national political actors and Government authorities, will be crucial in garnering regional and subregional support.

Finally, the principles of preventive diplomacy and good offices aimed at a negotiated political solution should not be overlooked, while the Congolese people and institutions should take the decisions regarding the future of their country. We must support their decisions on their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in order to achieve peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mrs. Gregoire Van Haaren (Netherlands) (*spoke in French*): The Kingdom of the Netherlands thanks Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing. The picture that he describes is bleak.

A year ago, faced with the threat of a crisis in the Kasai region and in eastern Congo, the New Year's Eve agreement brought about a glimmer of hope. Today the challenge is to revive hope for a way out of the crisis. At a time when the Security Council will soon have to consider the extension of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), three aspects have priority: the political climate, the protection of the civilian population and the serious humanitarian crisis.

With regard to the first aspect, on the political climate, we welcome the publication of the electoral calendar and the concrete measures taken with regard to holding the elections. Congolese citizens hope to have an opportunity to express themselves at the polls in 2018. However, that hope is continually threatened. Following the violent incidents of 31 December 2017, the African Union and the European Union called for respect for the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Congolese people, for when peaceful political protests are met with the use of lethal force and when religious services are interrupted by tear gas, the goal of free and fair elections becomes a mirage.

We wish to express our strong condemnation of the violence committed by the security forces, and we call for respect for human rights. The failure to implement the agreed confidence-building measures undermines the credibility of the electoral process. It is essential to put an immediate end to the harassment of civil society. All parties to the New Year's Eve agreement must reaffirm their commitment to the spirit of that agreement and to the electoral calendar, which is the only viable solution to that toxic political climate.

The second aspect is the protection of the civilian population. The Kingdom of the Netherlands supports the establishment of a special investigation into the recent attacks on peacekeepers in North Kivu. I take this opportunity to reiterate our condolences over the deaths of the MONUSCO peacekeepers. The special investigation will make it possible to assess the level of overall readiness and response of MONUSCO, as well as to identify and to prosecute the perpetrators. More generally, in the context of the strategic review, the Security Council should consider how to ensure that the reform of MONUSCO strengthens its capacity to protect civilians.

With regard to the third aspect, on the humanitarian crisis, the suffering of the Congolese people has reached unimaginable levels. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee has classified the new conflict as a level 3 emergency. Approximately 7.7 million people face a severe food shortage, and nearly 2 million children suffer from malnutrition, which will affect them for life. The famine in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is man-made — civilians must be protected from it. The Kingdom of the Netherlands advocates an integrated approach that includes humanitarian aid.

In conclusion, the current crisis is enormous. The Security Council cannot resolve it alone. It must listen to the countries and organizations of the region, promote their involvement and engage with them. While those countries and organizations are affected by the crisis, they also have the means and the duty to mobilize the political will for peace and stability in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

All the that requires unwavering determination and tremendous efforts, as demonstrated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. At the end of his term, we would like to thank Mr. Sidikou for his outstanding work at the Head of MONUSCO, which today is the largest peacekeeping operation. We extend our full support to Ms. Leila Zerrougui, who succeeds him, and we are committed to working with her for peace and stability for the Congolese people.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): First of all, let me thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his informative briefing. Let me also take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and its personnel for their involvement in the stabilization and peace process. Poland strongly condemns the latest attacks on MONUSCO personnel. I would like to offer our sincere condolences to the families of the victims and to the authorities of Tanzania.

We are very concerned about the recent developments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We would like to underline that the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must comply with its international obligations and protect the rights to free assembly and freedom of speech. It is crucial to guarantee democratic space for all actors involved. We take note of the long-awaited announcement by the Independent National Electoral Commission of the Democratic Republic of the Congo of the electoral calendar. It is important to ensure that the election is held on 23 December, since it is crucial to avoid further tensions and the possible escalation of violence in the country. The activities of the Electoral Commission must be credible, as they constitute the basis for fair elections. We would like to emphasize the importance of the voter registration process and encourage women to take part in it.

Poland encourages further political dialogue among all parties in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We also express our full support for the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as for MONUSCO. We believe that regional organizations can play a constructive role in the process of the stabilization of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank Under-Secretary-General Lacroix for his briefing this morning. I would first like to acknowledge and very much welcome the appointment of Ms. Leila Zerrougui as the new Special Representative. Of course, we acknowledge and greatly appreciate the services of Mr. Maman Sidikou.

Since our previous meeting (see S/PV.8067), the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has clearly continued to evolve — the establishment of an electoral calendar, the election date set for 23 December, peaceful protests on New Year's Eve, met with repression and deadly violence, and the deadly attack of 7 December on the base in Semuliki, North Kivu, against the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO).

With the worsening overall security situation throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in particular in the east, surging humanitarian needs and a political fragility, the key to changing that trajectory is a democratic transition of power and the creation of tolerant political space, based on the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections in the spirit of the agreement of 31 December 2017. Important building blocks for the elections — the calendar and the electoral law, as well as a budget — are now in place. The Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the opposition and other key stakeholders now need to contribute constructively to make sure that the elections are held on 23 December of this year. The international community has a role to play in supporting those efforts. Dialogue and coordination with the region will remain key, and we strongly support an active role of the guarantors.

The Security Council should also continue to follow the situation. For the elections to be credible, the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo urgently needs to implement the confidence-building measures agreed upon in the 31 December agreement. In that regard, we remain deeply concerned about the continued and recent reports of violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including those of assembly, speech and peaceful protest. The violent response to the events of New Year's Eve represents an unacceptable example of the lack of respect for human rights regarding which there can be no impunity for those responsible.

Ensuring women's full and equal participation in elections is also essential for a credible electoral process, including their safe access to polling stations.

We appreciate efforts to increase women's voter registration in the Kasai region. MONUSCO will continue to play a vital role in supporting the electoral process and in contributing to the protection of civilians. I take this opportunity to express our deepest condolences, of course, to Tanzania and MONUSCO for the losses resulting from the horrendous attack on 7 December.

Lastly, with regard to the continuing deteriorating humanitarian situation that others have also raised, the lack of resilience among the Congolese population makes it extremely vulnerable to conflict. In 2017, more people were forced to flee their homes in the Democratic Republic of the Congo than in any other country in the world. We, Sweden, are proud to be the third largest bilateral humanitarian donor, but we are deeply concerned about the record-low levels of funding to the Democratic Republic of the Congo's humanitarian appeal. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to encourage all countries to consider additional funding to that appeal.

Mr. Meza-Cuadra (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his informative briefing. We also welcome Ms. Leila Zerrougui of Algeria as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and pay tribute to Mr. Sidikou.

As this is the first time that we are taking the floor to speak on the subject of MONUSCO, we would first like to condemn in the strongest terms the attack on the Blue Helmets of MONUSCO in December, which led to the deaths of 15 peacekeepers and wounding of 44 others. The safety of MONUSCO personnel is absolutely essential to fulfilling its responsibilities, without which it would be unable to protect civilians. We therefore resolutely support the decisions adopted by the Secretariat to implement a plan of action, as well as the investigations led by Mr. Dmitry Titov, Assistant Secretary-General for Rule of Law and Security Institutions in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations. We also look forward to the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's cooperation in ensuring that those responsible are prosecuted and convicted.

Secondly, concerning the political process, we reiterate the importance of maintaining the date of 23 December for the holding of elections, but we also underscore that it is very important that there be no further delays and to ensure that the process be transparent and fair so that it will be acceptable to all stakeholders. The events of late last year demonstrate that the need to maintain the support and participation of the international community to ensure calm conditions allowing for the appropriate transition of power at the end of this year continues to be very important.

Thirdly, from the perspective of sustainable peace, like our colleagues who spoke before us we stress the gravity of the ongoing humanitarian crisis, which is primarily affecting children. The support of the international community and donors is needed to deal with the situation currently faced throughout the Congo. We also draw attention to the consequences of increasing political instability and the deteriorating economic situation, which is reflected in the rate of inflation affecting those most vulnerable. We believe that it is therefore very important to ensure that we decrease poverty and inequalities in a country that is facing many challenges in that regard.

Lastly, we emphasize the role that women and children can play in the political process currently taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we will support all efforts of MONUSCO aimed at involving them more substantially in that process.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, and like others who have spoken before me, I thank Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix for his briefing today. We highly commend the pivotal and important role played by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in fulfilling its mandate in the unstable security situation prevailing in the country.

We also strongly condemn the repeated attacks on the Mission, the latest of which took place in December and was generally the worst of its kind against peacekeeping operations over the past 25 years. It resulted in the killing of 15 Tanzanian peacekeepers, concerning whom we express our condolences to the Government and the people of Tanzania, the families of the victims, and the United Nations. Because such attacks have occurred in the past, we call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to pursue and prosecute their perpetrators. We commend

the Secretary-General's appointment of Mr. Titov to lead the investigation into the attack.

We followed with concern the protests that took place late last year and coincided with the date set for elections in the 31 December agreement, which stipulates the holding of presidential elections at the end of 2017, which unfortunately did not take place. Following the publication of the new electoral calendar by the Independent National Electoral Commission, in which the elections were formally delayed until 23 December 2018, opposition forces and their leaders, along with many civil society organizations, renewed their calls for demonstrations against the Government, which unfortunately led to casualties and more than 140 arrests.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, we also express our concern with regard to the facts and statistics contained in the report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/16) and the Under-Secretary-General's briefing in connection with displaced persons. The Under-Secretary-General stated that those numbers may increase, which would affect the Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring States. In that regard, we commend the work of MONUSCO in protecting and facilitating support for civilians, as well as the role of regional organizations working in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: the African Union, the European Union, the Southern African Development Community and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region. We pay tribute to their work to ensuring stability and security in the country.

As Chair of the Committee established pursuant to resolution 1533 (2004) concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo, I sincerely thank Ambassador Aboulatta, Permanent Representative of Egypt and former Chair of the Committee, for developing its working methods, following up diligently on the political and security situation in the country, and supporting the Group of Experts in fulfilling its mandate, including following up on the investigation into the attack against the two members of the group, Michael Sharp and Zaida Catalán, in March 2017. We also commend the steps taken by the Secretary-General in November to establish a United Nations panel of inquiry to investigate the killing of the two experts, and hope that the arrest of all perpetrators will be effectuated as soon as possible.

Lastly, we congratulate the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Leila Zerrougui, on her appointment as Head of MONUSCO, and thank her predecessor, Mr. Maman Sidikou, for his efforts.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I congratulate you, Sir, on assuming the presidency of the Security Council for the month of January. We are honoured to see the friendly country of Kazakhstan presiding over the deliberations of the Council today. I would like to thank you for taking my country's situation seriously and including it in your programme of work for this month, thereby giving us an opportunity to express our point of view on the issues under discussion. I would also like to take this opportunity to once again thank the Council on behalf of the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo for the untiring efforts of the United Nations to find solutions to the conflict that has prevailed in the eastern part of our country for several years.

We have thoroughly studied the Secretary-General's report (S/2018/16) on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), which Mr. Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, has just briefed us on. While we are grateful for his presentation, we believe that we can usefully improve the Council's understanding with some explanations on various points brought up in the report. In order to do that, we will touch on the political situation, the steps being taken to lessen political tensions, the security situation and, very briefly, on the strategic dialogue.

With regard to the political situation, during the last three months of 2017 the attention of every political stakeholder in our country was once again focused on the electoral process. As we mentioned in October (see S/PV.8067), the work of updating the electoral register, which had entered its last phase with the enrolment of voters in Kasai and Kasai Central provinces, as well as in the Luilu and Kamiji territories of Lomami province, will end this month. As of today, the registered voters number 45,810,308, of whom 24,095,030 are men and 21,715,278 women. It is important to note that the work of updating the electoral roll was entirely financed by the Government at a cost of $400,821,569.

As the Council can see, the Democratic Republic of the Congo authorities are determined to see that elections are held. On 31 December, President Joseph Kabila Kabange emphasized in an address to the nation that

> "today's adoption and promulgation of the Election Act, the registration of the electoral rolls and the subsequent distribution of seats and establishment of polling stations, in accordance with the electoral calendar published by the Independent National Electoral Commission, will lead us ineluctably to the holding of elections".

All of the active stakeholders in the country, especially the candidates, must work together to respect the established timetable. After the publication of the calendar, which, as we all know, fixed 23 December 2018 as the date for the elections, that part of the opposition that still resists compromise and everything that is being done to complete the process in an atmosphere of calm has continued to make waves.

The Council will undoubtedly agree with me that while we await the elections scheduled for 23 December 2018, the attitude we need from the political stakeholders and our citizens generally is a willingness to do everything possible to ensure that we are well prepared for these deadlines in an atmosphere of calm. It is therefore not helpful to be dealing with the agitation and protests that gave rise to the events of the kind that we experienced on 31 December organized by the Secular Coordination Committee, which is part of the Catholic Church, and supported by a fringe opposition that has rejected all compromise since the process began. The truth is that while agitating for elections, this fringe opposition does not actually seem to want to see them held.

Since we have to discuss the events of 31 December, it is important to point out that we have a law in the Democratic Republic of the Congo governing the organization of public demonstrations that requires that the relevant authorities be sent a request indicating the time that the demonstration will start, the route it will follow and the starting and ending points, in order to enable the security forces to keep order and protect the protesters if necessary. The information we have from the relevant authorities shows that the demonstration organizers did not comply with that legal procedure. Indeed, the letter that the Secular Coordination Committee sent to the Governor of Kinshasa on 27 December contained none of the information I have just described. Nor did it give the Committee's address so as to enable the city authorities to reach the interested parties in order to get the necessary details. In the circumstances, the Governor of the city could not authorize the holding of the demonstrations.

In any case, the Committee is not part of the official structures of the Catholic Church, which would therefore not recognize it legally. This explains why a large number of dioceses in the country and even parishes in the capital did not support the demonstration organizers. As for the results of these events, the information we have from the relevant authorities is that the Congolese National Police documented no deaths in places of worship in the Catholic parishes in two of the 49 dioceses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — that is, 10 parishes of 152 in the Kinshasa diocese, and one parish in Kamina diocese in Haut-Lomami province. However, five violent deaths were recorded on 31 December for the entire country, with no causal link to the events in question. Two of the deaths were of thieves — one a motorbike taxi driver by profession, José Fataki, a resident of No. 2 Kwenge quarter in Matete commune, and another who is still unidentified — both killed by the guards of a cold-storage room in the Mototo quarter in Matete commune, which they were robbing. Their bodies were brought by their accomplices to Saint Alphonse parish, near the commercial establishment they robbed. Father Hugues Ndongisila, the parish priest, confirmed this version, saying that the two who died were neither Christians nor demonstrators, and were not killed within the parish. The third was a Kamuina Nsapu terrorist, first name Arnolde, who was already wanted by law enforcement for other previous criminal activities and who had been mortally wounded during his participation on 31 December in an armed attack on two police stations at the Liberté market in Masina commune in Kinshasa that took place around two o'clock in the afternoon, long after public order had been restored. The fourth death was of a Congolese National Police officer named Mfufumba Latanase, from the mobile operations squad at the police station in Nsele commune, killed by Kamuina Nsapu terrorists in an attack on the Masina community centre. The last was an unidentified terrorist from a cell of the terrorist organization Kamuina Nsapu who had attempted to attack the offices of the military auditor in Kananga in Kasai Central province and was killed in clashes with security forces.

With regard to the law-enforcement personnel who attempted to enter the churches, the city's Governor, who condemned the situation, indicated that an investigation had been opened and that those found guilty would be punished. Regarding MONUSCO's other allegations, the Government is prepared to share information with it so as to ensure a full investigation of the situation on the ground, in order to take the necessary measures.

In any case, the Government deplores this avoidable situation, as an electoral register has already been updated and an electoral calendar published, so the path has already been cleared for the holding of elections in December.

To conclude on this point, my country's authorities would like to thank the United Nations and all international partners who continue to support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to ensure that the electoral process, which has been proceeding smoothly to date, has a successful outcome for the people of the country.

As far as the confidence-building measures set out in the Comprehensive and Inclusive Political Agreement of 31 December 2016, the report notes that 107 political prisoners are still being detained. Information provided by the Government indicates that all so-called political prisoners have been released, except for two individuals who were not detained for political reasons: Mr. Diomi Ndongala and Mr. Claude Muyambo. As we have already stated, these two individuals are being prosecuted for violations of common law. The first was convicted of the rape of two minor twin sisters and the second for having illegally acquired privately owned buildings. Mr. Moise Katumbi is being prosecuted for violations that are similar to those committed by Mr. Muyambo.

I think that the Council will agree that the Government, which is supposed to protect everyone and ensure justice, cannot intervene in the affairs of private citizens in such a way that the strongest would be favoured over the weakest.

As noted in paragraph 13 of the report, the security situation has improved in most conflict areas, in both North and South Kivu and in Kasai. This is despite the fact that, as underscored in the report, there has been heightened activity by certain national and foreign armed groups in North Kivu involving targeted attacks against the civilian population, the Congolese security forces and Blue Helmets.

There is no need to recall here that in spite of all of the efforts that we have undertaken together to restore peace and security in that part of the country, these attacks have already taken the lives of thousands of Congolese people, members of the security forces and several peacekeepers. Here I would like, on behalf of my Government, to strongly condemn these attacks and to pay tribute to the memory of the brave Tanzanian peacekeepers who lost their lives on 6 December 2017, at a time when we still very much needed them. This sad and unacceptable situation forces us to review our methods of work by strengthening our strategic measures so as to achieve better outcomes and avoid having to deplore any further loss of life.

As far as the presence of various foreign armed groups such as the Allied Democratic Forces, the Lord's Resistance Army and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda (FDLR), as we have always underscored, our armed forces, which have made tremendous sacrifices in combating these criminals, will continue their efforts in cooperation with MONUSCO to completely eradicate these groups, in order to allow our people to live in lasting peace.

In connection with the operations being conducted to eradicate these groups, my Government appreciates the repatriation efforts undertaken by MONUSCO in cooperation with the Governments of the countries whose nationals are members of these groups. That is the case, as mentioned in the report, of the repatriation to Rwanda of members of the FDLR and the resettlement in Ethiopia, Kenya, the Sudan and the United States of 219 combatants of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement/Sudanese People's Liberation Army in Opposition. My Government would like to see these efforts continue until the repatriation or resettlement in third countries of all combatants who are still in transit camps.

In the same context, I would like to focus once again on the case of the 340 FDLR combatants who have been awaiting repatriation in transit camps in Kanybayonga, North Kivu; Walungu, in South Kivu; and Kisangani, in Tshopo. I would like to reiterate once again to the international community my Government's call for their repatriation to their countries of origin or, failing that, to a third country outside the Great Lakes region.

I cannot conclude without mentioning the Kasai provinces and Kasai Central, which were the targets of terrorist attacks by the Kamuina Nsapu militia.

As the Council is aware, calm has been restored, and investigations are under way to determine the exact circumstances of the crimes committed and to prosecute and punish those responsible.

Before concluding, it is important to note that my Government would like to see the strategic dialogue accelerated, in accordance with resolution 2348 (2017), so that the next report of the Secretary-General on MONUSCO, which will be a reference document in the context of the upcoming renewal of the mandate of MONUSCO, will provide a coordinated vision that includes the views of both parties.

I would like also to express the deep appreciation of my Government to Mr. Maman Samba Sidikou, former Special Representative of the Secretary-General, for the work he did during his term as Head of MONUSCO to ensure that peace was restored in my country. My Government is very grateful to him.

In the same context, my Government welcomes the appointment of Ms. Leila Zerrougui as the new Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and we assure her that we will cooperate fully with her, as we did with her predecessor, in order to enable her to successfully discharge her mandate.

Finally, my delegation would like, as we begin this new year, to convey to all members of the Council its best wishes for a successful 2018.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers. I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.